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ABSTRACT

The authors identified those Community School Districts in New York City that have a minority population of at least 60 percent and also contain a non-Hispanic white residential enclave. By studying the election results for these school districts, the authors tested the hypothesis that non-Hispanic white middle-class voters had a disproportionate influence on the 1975 Community School Board Election. Preliminary analysis of a comparison of census data with election results indicates that non-Hispanic white middle-class voters in the enclaves did have a disproportionate effect on the final results. Proportional representation partially explains this disproportionate influence. (Author)

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THE EFFECTS OF RACE, ETHNICITY AND CLASS IN THE 1975 NEW YORK CITY COMMUNITY SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS

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One area of educational research that has received little attention is how race, ethnicity and class effect patterns of voter behavior in school board elections. While many studies have been conducted on both voter behavior and school board elections, little research is available on voter behavior in school board elections. The purpose of this paper is to consider the effects of race, ethnicity and social class on the results of the most recent elections for Community Schoolboard in New York City.

A major reason for decentralizing the New York City school system into thirty-two community districts with their own locally-elected boards was to allow parents and community members increased influence in the operation of their local schools. Spokesmen for minority groups saw in decentralization an opportunity to make the schools more reflective of local community cultures and aspirations. Providing for the popular election of schoolboard members was seen as a way to free the boards from the political influence of City Hall and the educational dominance of 110 Livingston Street, the headquarters of the central board.

In the years since the 1970 decentralization, however, many felt that the local boards were not representing accurately the racial and ethnic composition of their communities. If this is so, the principle motivation for decentralization has been undermined.

> "Desirable theoretically, the system none the less failed . . . to stimulate wide and intense citizen involvement in the schools--an involvement that was considered essential for achieving the ultimate purposes of decentralization." (PEA, 1)

In testifying before the Rubin Commission on community school board elections in New York City, David Seeley, Executive Director of the Public Education Association, indicated that he felt major structural and administrative changes must be made in the community school board election system if school boards are to achieve their goal of promoting participation in the educational process. Also giving testimony to the Rubin Commission was Miriam Thompson, Coordinator of the Queens Lay Advocate Service;" . . . to bring school issues closer to the community and encourage (community) participation . . . ." (Thompson, 2) The source of such undermining may lie in the voting patterns of ethnic, racial, and class groupings, or it may reflect the special nature of the electoral process in the New York City schoolboard elections.

Political scientists have long been aware that middle-class white voters are more likely to vote than their lower-class, non-white fellow citizens. As Gerald Pomper has noted, "Among the many factors that may affect voting, perhaps the most obvious is social class . . . . The ballot box can hardly be isolated from the pervasive effects of the cash box." (Pomper, 42) According to Bone and Ranney (45), "more educated people vote more than less educated people with high socioeconomic status more than people with low status, Catholics and Jews more than Protestants, and whites more than Negroes." The Jewish vote is especially

important in view of the fact that, "80% of those who are registered usually turnout to vote." (Apple, 23) Most of the studies that have led to these generalizations are based on analysis of voting turnout in presidential elections. Grassroots elections, such as those for schoolboard, have played no part in establishing the rules of thumb about who is likely to vote and who is not. We assumed, at the outset, that the voting behavior of New Yorkers would be little different from that of other Americans, and that schoolboard elections would not differ in the characteristics of their participants from other elections. Indeed, one of the few studies of who votes for schoolboard has indicated that <u>inactive voters</u> are "older and have low educational levels. They either have no children or their children are not in school . . . if they are in less skilled occupations." (Carter, 90)

The thirty-two local schoolboards provide excellent laboratories for the analysis of voting behavior. It was the intent of the architects of school decentralization to create districts that were a microcosm of the city. The population size of each district, a quarter of a million residents, was to insure that each district would encompass a heterogeneous population. As it turned out, many of the districts, if not exactly homogeneous, were less ethnically and racially diverse than the city as a whole. As the 1975 elections for schoolboard got underway, we could identify only seven districts whose population included white and non-white residents, with distinct white enclave populations. In many of the districts the public school population is close to 100% non-white.

In terms of ethnicity and race the difference between the citywide general and school populations is substantial. Blacks make up 21% of the population of the city, and Puerto Ricans comprise another 10%. However, Black and Puerto Rican students comprise almost 66% of the population of the public schools. Residence patterns have led to solidly white, or Hispanic, or Black neighborhoods. The careful drawing of school district boundaries, combined with parents fraudulently registering their children in out-of-district schools, have led to substantially segregated schools in many areas of the city.

The seven districts we chose for study, while containing pockets of white residence in what were basically non-white communities, had few white pupils in the public schools. However, since both parents and non-parents were eligible to vote in the elections, the voter turn-out was not likely to reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the schools alone. We chose these seven districts to test a predominant assertion among observers of the New York school politics scene: that small groups of white voters were exerting disproportionate influence on the composition of local schoolboards as a result of their voting patterns. In each of these districts, by virtue of the racial and ethnic composition of both the grade schools and the general population, Black and Hispanic citizens should have had the lion's share of membership on the local school boards. In all but one case, they did not.

To further the original goal of creating a system of school governance reflecting the composition of the community, proportional representation was adopted as the method for electing board members. Proportional Representation (or P.R., as it is popularly known) is not new to New York.* For more than a decade, during the Thirties and Forties, New Yorkers elected members of their City Council by proportional representation. In P.R., candidates are chosen through a priority voting system. A voter indicates first, second and other rankings for candidates. Once a determined quota of votes is achieved, other votes are passed on to second choice candidates, until a sufficient number are selected. Both supporters and opponents of P.R. have agreed as to what the results are, but they disagree as to the effect. During the debate that raged over the abolition of the P.R. in the post-Second World War period in New York, George Hallet wrote:

> P.R. . . . strikes at the root defect of the so-called majority systems of election by assuring due representation to minorities, minority parties, minorities within parties, and independent minorities that do not wish to be represented by party lines. (165)

In reply, a Professor Hermens wrote, "By its very nature it asks for minorities, and ultimately it may produce so many minor minorities that no majority is left." (174) Many ethnic and racial minorities rallied to the cause of P.R. when it was threatened,

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*For a concise explanation of proportional representation the following pamphlets are available from the National Municipal League, 47 East 68th Street, New York City, N.Y. 10021. Proportional Representation The Key To Democracy by George Hallet (25 cents) and P.R. (5 cents).

believing that their political survival was tied to the continuation of P.R. Zeller and Bone observed,

> In Harlem, where most of Manhattan's Negroes live, there was unusual activity to save P.R. The Amsterdam News, a Harlem weekly paper, strongly supported retention. The Harlem Citizens Committee in Support of P.R. . . . hailed it for 'freeing Harlem from the ghetto system . . . If P.R. is repealed, there will not be a single Negro in the Council." (1138)

The adoption of Proportional Representation for schoolboard elections was predicated on the thesis that it would permit the varying ethnic and racial groups in each district to win office without resorting to partisan affiliation. A system that is said to guarantee minority representation, it was reasoned, would work well in a process that was aimed at increasing the presence of minorities on schoolboards.

Two techniques were brought together, therefore, to ensure that minorities would be given a voice in local schoolboard matters: the creation of thirty-two districts, with some attention given while drawing the lines, to the communities they encompass; and, the use of Proportional Representation. The problem that led to the demise of the original P.R. plan in New York either did not enter into the calculations of the authors or decentralization, or it was ignored. In the original P.R. plan, some minorities were overrepresented in the City Council. Among the victors, the most obnoxious to many were the two Communists elected. Their victory was the result of the discipline that their followers showed in voting. The election of Communists and other splinter groups,

whose representation on the Council was way out of proporation to their support in the general community, was a source of dismay both among observers and supporters of P.R. It may be that the current view that older white voters disproportionately dominate elections in minority ethnic and racial area is nothing more than a reincarnation of the original complaint.

Several questions are raised by the 1975 New York City Schoolboards elections: do numerical minorities have a disproportionate participation in the selection of members of the local boards; are there differences, beside race and ethnicity, between the minorities and majorities in these districts; do the numerical minority voters cast their ballots in a pattern different than others in the district; are the votes of numerical minority voters determinant in the final selection of members of the local boards?

METHOD

For the sake of this study, we chose districts where numerical minority voters were white, rather than Black and Hispanic. In five of the seven districts the numerical minority voters live in enclaves with easily definable boundaries. Also included in the study are two districts that, while not conforming to the enclave criterion, are identified by observers of New York City schoolboard contests as having similar politics and electoral behavior as the five "pure" districts.

Districts were chosen on the basis of census tract data. Since

the 197' census is appreciably outdated in some of the city's districts because of high residential mobility patterns, we relied on panels of experts to advise us, as well. One panel was recruited for each district under consideration. Panels included members of of the State Legislature and City Council, community school activists, and staff members of such educational organizations as the Public Education Association.

By cross-referencing data on school districts provided by the New York City Planning Commission with registratio, and turn-out data provided on an Election District (similar to an election precinct) basis by the Board of Elections, we obtained quantitative information for each enclave. A special arrangement exists whereby parents who are not regularly registered voters may participate in schoolboard elections. The Board of Elections maintains separate lists for these voters, and we utilized them in our analysis. The Board of Elections maintains Election District analysis sheets not only on the final vote received by each candidate, but the number of first, second and additional ballots cast for winning candidates. This made it relatively easy to determine the role that enclave Election Districts had in securing a quota (the number of votes necessary to win).

Finally, despite assertions that P.R. leads to the destruction of the two-party system, the 1975 elections were marked by the emergence of two strongly competitive parties: the slates supported by the United Federation of Teachers and their allies, and the slates

supported by the Alliance for Children and their allies.. In each of the districts we studied the latter slates received help from most ethnic and racial minority-dominated Parents Associations. It was assumed, among people with an interest in school politics, that the teacher union supported slates catered to the white middle-class voter and parent. We ascertained the endorsement of candidates by the two "parties" from advertisements in the New York Times purchased by each of them prior to election day. Each advertisement listed the favored candidates in every district in the city.

THE DISTRICTS

The seven districts chosen for study may be divided into three categories. Pure enclave districts: districts 13, 19, 23, and 32 are all located in Brooklyn. The white population in these districts ranges from a low 8% in district 23 to 40% in district 19. In each case, the majority of white residents lives in a definable geographic area within the district. In district 23, for instance, the white population is concentrated in two housing projects.

Scattered enclave districts: district 17, also located in Brooklyn, is in a category by itself. With a white population of 32.8%, it fulfills the requirement of being a non-Hispanic white district with a white numerical minority. Unlike the pure enclave districts, however, its white population is scattered throughout the district in small pockets of population concentration. There

is a small but well organized community of Hassidic Jews in one section of the district, and other pockets of middle class and lower-middle class voters in other areas.

Mobility districts: there are two mobility districts in our study: district 1 in Manhattan, and 14 in Brooklyn. In each district, the 1970 census indicates a slight margin of white residents over non-whites and Hispanics. The white population of each is about 51%. However, each of these is a district of high residential mobility, with whites moving out in large numbers, and being replaced by non-whites and Hispanics. Large numbers of non-enumerated residents, mostly illegal aliens, are said to live in these areas. These people send their children to the public schools, where the overwhelming majority of pupils are non-white. It was the opinion of our panels that the census data were no longer an accurate reflection of the make-up of the districts. Too, school political patterns in these districts closely parallel the racial confrontations of the pure enclave districts. We decided, therefore, to include these in the study.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ENCLAVES COMPARED TO ENTIRE DISTRICT

In all the districts studied, except district 32, the median income for families within the enclave was higher than for the district at large. In district 32 the difference is minimal. (see Table 1) The differences range from $6,573 in district 13 (a pure district) to $12 (the enclave income was lower than that of the district) in district 32 (also a pure district).

A traditional measure of socio-economic status is years of formal education. In terms of median years of education, the enclaves generally show a higher educational level than did the districts as a whole. (see Table 2) The exceptions were in districts 32 and 14. In district 14, the enclave's median education level was .3 lower than the district, while district 32 averaged .6 lower in the enclave than the whole district. One explanation for the findings in district 32 is that the enclave contains large numbers of newly arrived Italian and Latin American immigrants. It should be noted that district 23 was the only one in which the difference in education was a year or more between the enclave and the district. Panel members tended to posit that one reason was that most of the white residents were older or retired workers, either immigrants or products of the Depression, who stayed behind when younger white middle-class residents moved to predominately white communities in the early and mid-Sixties.

The enclaves vary widely in their potential political impact on their districts. In terms of the number of election districts represented, the range is from three percent of the election district 23 to fifty-seven percent in district one. As a percentage of the total population of the school district, enclave populations also vary. In district 1, fifty-seven percent of all residents live in the enclave, as opposed to six percent in district 23 and 16 percent in district 13. (see Table 3)

Enclave residents are more likely to be registered to vote than their counterparts in the district as a whole. Only in two

districts, 14 and 32, did the enclave fail to have an edge in those eligible to vote. Registration is an important factor in the analysis of enclave political power. Although it was possible for a non-registered resident of the district to obtain special "parent registration", a very small number availed themselves of this opportunity. The largest number of eligible parent voters, 929, was in district 32. Of this number, 506 actually cast votes. They accounted for 22% of all voters in the 1975 elections. District 32 was a typical of the enclave districts studies. In no other district did parent voters comprise more than seven percent of the total turnout. (Table 4)

Voter turnout in the United States in all elections has been steadily declining over the past decade. Never high to begin with, it reached its nadir in the past several years. However, compared to schoolboard elections, the turnout in other types of contests is high. New Yrok City is no exception to the rule that schoolboard races evoke little voter interest. In the seven districts analyzed, none had eligible votes turnouts of one third or more. All but one district had voter turnout of less than twenty percent. In that district, district one, the greater turnout may be attributed to the unusual circumstances of the contest. A major clash between the Hispanic and Jewish communities abetted by the funds and forces of the United Federation of Teachers on one side, and the Alliance for Children, the municipal workers union (District Council 37), and local parent groups on the other side, created high media attention. The confrontation resulted in the

major "vote pulling" effort of 1975, with hundreds of campaign workers descending on the district from all over the city in the final days of the contest.

In the other districts low funding, a low level of initial voter interest, and a lack of attention by the press and electronic media kept turnout at a record low. In six of the seven districts, residents of the enclave turned out in higher percentages than voters in the district as a whole. In the one district where this was not the case, six percent of enclave voters and seven percent of voters in the entire district cast ballots, not an impressive figure. (see Table 5)

At this point in our analysis the added factor of proportional representation enters. As we have indicated, P.R. is different than single-ballot elections in that disciplined minorities may, by strategically ordering their votes, gain a disproportionate number of victories. Such victory requires a combination of attributes: the voters must be sophisticated enough to understand the strategy; disciplined enough to employ the tactics without deviating; and possess the motivation necessary both to turn out and vote in such a disciplined manner. Apparently, at least some voters possessed all of these attributes. The strategic component was the least difficult. Both parties in the election had communicated to their followers the necessity of creating slates and encouraging slate voting with indicated priorities. ". . . the candidates in 1975 did develope strategies to maximize advantages based on the complexities of the proportional representation system." (Huhn, 24)

The motivation was more difficult to achieve. Ethnic solidarity, religious affiliation (especially among white voters with children in parochial school), and to some degree racism appear to have been among the chief sources of motivation. One study, prepared by Ellen Lurie of the Community Service Society, dealt with voting patterns in one of Manhattan's districts. In her analysis of "transfer", which takes place when one candidate goes out of the running and has votes transferred to another candidate, she noted:

> As was true in 1973, when candidates went out their vote transferred mainly to others on their slate, although most times it was to persons of the same race on the same slate. (p. 5)

In the May 2nd, issue of the widely circulated Jewish Press, education columnist Ben Greenberg adopted as an "excellent guide-post" for the selection of community school board candidates, the endorsements of the Agudath Israel and the Association of Orthodox Jewish Teachers. He commented that both organizations and named "a number of non-Jewish candidates to their slate." The number thus named was thirteen, or eighty-two candidates endorsed joinly by the two roganizations.

With proportionately higher levels of education, higher socio-economic status, greater homogeneity and concentration of residence, and higher percentage of registration and turnout, the enclave voters should have had some disproportionate effect on the schoolboard races. Clearly, proportional representation has a middle-class bias to it. A complex electoral system, it demands greater sophistication than the simple pulling of a lever or the marking of a cross in a box on a ballot. To be strategically

successful requires educating voter to slates, the order of names appearing on slates, and the way to cast votes for those candidates. Another element that so far has not been measured but may determine success is chance. "Chance operated in the selection of the order of the count of election districts within school districts. It also operates in the specific sequence of ballots selected to be transferred from candidates reaching quota." (Huhn, 25) School-board elections, marked by low media attention, little information about the candidates and issues, and an off-year, off-schedule voting day (not November, but May; not in an even numbered year when most New York elections take place), require voters with motivation to inform themselves and discover the right time to vote. All of these factor create a bias in favor of the more affluent and educated voter. Enclave voters possessed just such characteristics.

CONCLUSIONS

What role did the enclaves play in the outcome of the elections? Of the sixty-three victors in the seven districts, twenty-eight received half or more of their winning votes from election districts in the enclaves. Two candidates in district 19 and one candidate in district 32 would have been elected without any votes from outside the enclave. In district 19, one of the candidates received two-thirds of his votes from enclave voters, while another received 86% of his vote from the enclave. In district 23, enclave voters cast almost 80% of the votes of one winning candidate. In all at least 44% of winning candidates

relied on enclave voters to insure their elections.

Do these figures indicate that the enclave voter had a disproportionate influence on the election results? The answer to this would appear to depend upon what criteria are used to measure disproportionate influence. If raw population figures, total registration figures, or the number of election districts in the enclaves, are considered the answer to the above question would be yes. However, if voter turnout figures are used, it does not appear that the enclaves had an influence beyond their numbers. In six of the seven districts, the percentage of enclave residents who voted was greater than the percentage of the districts' population that reside in the enclave (see Table 6). In the two mobility districts,, enclave residents cast 60% or more of the districts' total vote. In one other district (19), enclave voters accounted for a majority of the total vote. Only in district 23, where the enclave population is quite small, did enclave voters fail to account for a minimum of 29% of the total vote.

In three of the districts, more than half of the winning candidates received at least fifty percent of their votes from the enclaves. (see Table 6) (It must be remembered that these results only refer to first count votes and do not include transfer votes from other candidates.) In all of the districts, at least one winning candidate received more than half of his/her votes from the enclave. It appears evident that the number of successful candidates who received fifty percent, or more, or their votes from the enclaves is in proportion to the percentage of votes cast by

enclave voters. The one exception occured in district 23 where enclave voters accounted for only seven percent of the total vote; however, two winning candidates received at least half of their votes from th enclave. In fact, in districts 14 and 17, it appears that the enclave had less influence than their voter percentage warranted. One explanation for this phenomenon in district 17, is that the enclave population is scattered throughout the district.

How may we summarize our findings? First, when compared to the district's total population numerical minorities had a disproportionate influence in the selection of the seven local boards studied. Second, when compared to voter turnout, the numerical minorities did not exert a disproportionate influence of the election results. Third, these numerical minorities may be characterized as being better educated, more affluent, more likely to be a registered voter, and more likely to vote than their non-white and Hispanic neighbors. Fourth, the system of proportional representation though it did aid well-organized and disciplined groups, was reflective of the total vote. The raison d'etre of P.R. is to give minorities a proportionate share of representation and in these seven districts it did. Fifth, due mainly to voter turnout, the white-numerical minority voters in enclaves dominated by non-whites and Hispanics managed to effect the outcome of the elections disproportionate to threir numbers.

With this in mind, we may conclude that due to patterns of voter turnout the intent of the architects of the present decentralization plan for selecting local schoolboard members in New York

City has not been realized. Whatever the attributes of the present system, one is lacking: members of schoolboards are not selected in a way that produces winners supported by the preponderant population. Put another way, schoolboard elections in New York in 1975 foiled, rather than fostered, at least in some school districts, the purpose of grassroots, representative school politics.

TABLE 1: MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME

	DISTRICT						
	1	13	14	17	19	23	32
Enclave Income	7131	13,254	8,347	9,510	9,079	9,228	5,653
District Income	6005	6681	7224	6419	7472	5508	5665
Difference	1126	6573	1123	3091	1607	3720	12

TABLE 2: MEDIAN YEARS OF EDUCATION

	DISTRICT						
	1	13	14	17	19	23	32
Enclave Education	9.9	13.4	9.4	11.6	11	10.9	8.6
District Education	9.8	12.7	9.7	11.4	10.3	9.9	9.2
Difference	.1	.7	.3	.2	.7	1.0	.6

TABLE 3: % POPULATION AND % ELECTION DISTRICTS - OF ENCLAVE AREAS IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

	DISTRICTS						
	1	13	14	17	19	23	32
% of District E.D.s in Enclave	57	14	38	27	28	3	30
% District Population in Enclave	57	16	51	35	36	6	32

TABLE 4:

PERCENT VOTERS AS A FACTOR IN DISTRICT TURNOUT

	DISTRICTS						
	1	13	14	19	23	32	17
Registered Parent Voters	358	549	529	378	573	329	625
Parent Voters Actually Voting	191	173	295	170	269	506	438
Total Votes Cast	12,659	4,670	10,942	6,702	3,847	2,306	5,984
% of Votes Cast By Parent Voters	1	4	3	2	7	22	7

TABLE 5: % OF ENCLAVE AND DISTRICT VOTERS WHO VOTED

	DISTRICTS						
	1	13	14	17	19	23	32
% of Voter Turnout In Enclaves	35	20	31	6	24	40	14
% of Voter Turnout In Districts	31	8	18	7	16	17	10

TABLE 6:

% OF ENCLAVE RESIDENCE, DISTRICT VOTERS WHO LIVE IN THE ENCLAVE AND NUMBER OF WINNING CANDIDATES RECEIVING 50% OR MORE FIRST PLACE VOTER FROM THE ENCLAVE.

	DISTRICTS						
	1	13	14	17	19	23	32
% of District Population In Enclave	57	16	51	35	36	6	32
% Of District Turnout Residing In The Enclave	64	41	60	29	54	7	46
Number Of Winning Candidates Who Received 50% Or More Of First Place Votes From The Enclave	7	4	3	1	6	2	5